



VIDEO

FAQ

Q The phrase 'high definition' seems to be popping all over the place. What does it mean, what can I watch and what do I need to enjoy it?

A High definition (HD) is a catch-all phrase that describes the move to higher-resolution digital video.



Compatible displays and video players are available now, but content is still a little way off.

HD screens are probably the best place to start: an HD television must support a minimum resolution of 1,280x720 pixels; current digital PAL broadcasts have a resolution of 720x576. This is not revolutionary, of course, as PC displays have supported such high resolutions for years.

Once you have an HD display (look for the HD Ready logo), you'll need HD content, such as a video file, to try it out. At the moment very little HD content is available in the UK, but this is soon set to change. Sky will be broadcasting HD channels featuring movies and football in 2006, although you'll need a new Sky box to receive it.

Meanwhile, HD-DVD and Blu-ray discs are set to compete to become the DVD standard's successor. The first players should be available next year. Microsoft and Sony are also preparing to release their HD-compatible games consoles, and the Xbox 360 will be available later this year.

But if you can't wait, you could always create your own HD content to watch. A few HD camcorders have arrived on the market, although most are very expensive. Sony has released an HD Handycam, the HDR-HC1, which we will be looking at next month.

These high-resolution video files will take up a lot of storage space. Recording in HD will create massive files, whether from a camcorder or directly from HD broadcasts. Fortunately, hard disks continue to grow in capacity and the new HD optical formats will be able to store up to 50GB of data on a single disc.

Our advice is not to rush into HD. Wait for the content you want to become available, and buy a display and other devices accordingly. If you are planning to buy a new TV this Christmas, make sure its HD-compatible or you may have to replace it in a couple of years.

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▲ To view HD video you need a compatible TV such as Acer's AT320W, reviewed in *What's New*, issue 213

REVIEW MEDIA PLAYER

DVICO
TViX M3000U

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £130 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.afterhours.co.uk

DETAILS www.tvix.co.kr

The TViX is a portable media player that's designed to let you take your digital pictures and music with you wherever you go. Rather than having its own display, though, it connects to a TV. It has composite, S-video and component outputs so it should connect to any television set, although a SCART socket is notably absent.

The device also comes without a hard disk, so you'll have to add your own parallel ATA disk. We think this is a good idea, as lots of people have spare hard disks lying around. If you don't, you can buy an 80GB disk for as little as £35.

Getting media on to the TViX couldn't be easier. Windows automatically recognises it as an external storage device and its hard disk shows up in My Computer. You can drag and drop the files you want, and this process is fast thanks to the USB Hi-Speed connection.

The TViX is compatible with most audio and video files with the exception of WMV, though this is easily remedied with a software download from the TViX website. The TViXManager scans your PC for compatible files, and can even convert certain incompatible video formats using an Xvid encoder.

The device includes native support for VOB files, but you must rip DVDs manually. Not all of them will play correctly; you may have to convert the files to MPEG2. The TViX isn't suitable for anyone who isn't comfortable converting file types.

The black and silver colour scheme will match many modern PCs. The plastic body is sturdy and



should take a few knocks. As there is no display, you can control the TViX only when it's connected to a TV. The simple controls on the top of the box mean you can get by without a remote, but you shouldn't have to as there's one in the box.

Quality was fine across the board, and we were particularly pleased with the component output, which supports high-definition video.

Provided your TV can display this, you'll be impressed with the results. The TViX can also output its menus in high definition, which makes them much easier to navigate. That said, the picture was also very good through the S-video outputs.

There's no need to worry about audio quality, either. Phono outputs enable you to connect the device directly to most stereos, which is great for playing digital music. Movie fans will appreciate the optical S/PDIF, which outputs Dolby Digital or DTS surround sound to a suitable amplifier.

The TViX won't appeal to anyone who wants to stream audio and video from their PC to their living room. However, it's perfect for taking on holiday or on business trips, as you can get all your media on one portable box. It's a great product and works well, but avoid it if you're not comfortable with ripping video and converting file formats.

Seth Barton



Easy to set up; selects a hard disk for your needs



No LCD; no WMV support

SPECIFICATIONS USB Hi-Speed, composite out, S-video out, component out, phono out, optical S/PDIF out. Supports AVI, XviD+MP3/AC3, MPEG1, MPEG2, VOB, MP3, WMA, Ogg, WAV and JPEG file formats. Part code M3000U

HOTLIST HYBRID TV TUNER

TWINHAN
Ter D+A

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £53 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.pcnextday.co.uk

DETAILS www.twinhan.com

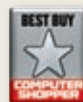
Twinhan's Ter D+A is a hybrid device so it not only accepts digital and analogue broadcasts but also has S-video and composite inputs. Installation is simple and setup is easier still due to CyberLink's excellent PowerCinema 4 software.

You get a great Sky+ style EPG, excellent picture quality and a remote control for armchair operation. Whatever you need from a TV tuner, the Ter D+A can handle it, and it's a bargain, too.



SPECIFICATIONS Analogue and DVB tuners, composite and S-video inputs, FM radio, CyberLink PowerCinema 4

HOTLIST DIGITAL VIDEO CAMERA

PANASONIC
NV-GS75

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £356 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.cameras2u.com

DETAILS www.panasonic.co.uk

Panasonic's NV-GS75 offers three CCDs at an affordable price. The technology gives the camera excellent picture quality and vivid colours. Only the 10x optical zoom seems a bit stingy compared to other models on the market.

Despite being lightweight and plastic, the NV-GS75 feels well made. The lack of a true 16:9 mode is the only big let-down on an otherwise excellent and affordable DV camera.



SPECIFICATIONS Mini DV camcorder, 3 CCD, 10x optical zoom, USB2 and FireWire interfaces. Part code NVGS75



REVIEW TV TUNERS

FREECOM DVB-T USB STICK

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £50 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.dabs.comDETAILS www.freecom.com

TERRATEC Cinergy hybrid T USB XS

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £130 inc VAT

SUPPLIER Eurotech 08704 580011

DETAILS www.euro-tech.co.uk

Just after last month's TV tuner Labs, we received two new devices. Both are tiny – just larger than a USB memory drive – and plug neatly into any USB2 port. These devices are ideal for use with notebooks, either at home or on the road. The Freecom DVB-T USB stick is small and black. Terratec's Cinergy hybrid T USB XS is bigger, with an orange and white colour scheme. Both devices receive digital TV signals. The Terratec also receives analogue TV and has S-video and composite inputs for capturing video from older sources, such as video recorders.

Both devices installed without hassle. Once the drivers and software were installed, the Freecom's channel scan software popped up automatically. The scan was quick and found all the Freeview channels. The Terratec device uses CyberLink's excellent PowerCinema 4 software, with a simple setup wizard. Analogue and digital setups went smoothly and all the usual channels were found.

The Freecom's interface is fiddly, with tiny buttons that are a pain to click. A mini remote control is supplied, which provides basic channel



and volume commands. By comparison, the Terratec is a joy to use. Full-screen and windowed interfaces are well laid out and intuitive. The remote control is a full-size device with various short cut buttons that control PowerCinema's media playback capabilities. For EPG and recording functions, the Terratec comes out on top. The PowerCinema EPG looks similar to the excellent Sky+ system, while Freecom's looks cobbled together. It appears in a pop-up screen you can't resize, and you can't view multiple channel listings at once. Both devices feature easy recording options from the EPG, but finding the programme you want is easier on the Terratec model.

For picture and recording quality, there's little to choose between them. Testing on a widescreen media notebook, both gave excellent playback quality free from artefacts and noise. Recordings from both were excellent, and the digital TV MPEG2 streams showed no signs of degradation. The Terratec's analogue performance was solid, with little ghosting and noise from our weak aerial.

Terratec's device has better software and hybrid capabilities, but Freecom's USB stick costs £80 less, and for basic TV viewing and recording it's more than capable. It's better for those who want to watch the odd programme on their notebooks.

Seth Barton

SPECIFICATIONS Freecom RF input, MPEG2 capture format, USB Hi-Speed interface. Terratec RF, line in, composite and S-video inputs, MPEG2 capture format, USB Hi-Speed interface.

HOTLIST PORTABLE DVD PLAYER

MUSTEK PL510

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £230 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.meggydogcomputers.co.ukDETAILS www.mustek.com

With a large 10" screen, Mustek's PL510 portable DVD player is a joy to watch and it still fits comfortably in your lap. It supports Dolby Digital stereo, so listening to movies using headphones is an enjoyable experience.

Battery life is an acceptable two-and-a-half hours, which will let you watch all but the longest films. Unfortunately it lacks DivX playback for home video encoders.

SPECIFICATIONS 10" LCD, 2½ hours' playback, multi-region DVD, SD/MMC card reader. Part code PL510



HOTLIST MEDIA PLAYER

PINNACLE ShowCenter 200

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £162 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.savastore.comDETAILS www.pinnaclesys.com

The ShowCenter 200 streams media files from your PC to your living room using Microsoft's Media Connect software. It supports all the most common photo, audio and video file types and is easy to install. Its wired and wireless connections mean it will fit into any home network, too. It's the best media player on the market.

SPECIFICATIONS 1.5GHz PC required with Windows XP with SP1 and 256MB RAM; SCART, component, S-video, and composite outputs, two stereo phono outputs, coaxial S/PDIF output, optical S/PDIF outputs, USB, 100Mbps network, wireless 802.11g



CHOOSING A...

DV CAMERA



Step-by-step guide to buying the ideal digital video camera

- 1 If you just want to make home movies, a £250 digital video (DV) camera with the specs shown below will be fine. A range of auto-exposure modes will ensure you get decent results in all conditions. The LCD screen provides easy playback on location, while the remote allows for comfortable viewing on the sofa. If you'll be using the zoom a lot, concentrate on the optical zoom spec, as the digital zoom's effective range depends on this.
- 2 To edit video, get a model with DV-in. You can transfer edited footage back to MiniDV tape and run off VHS copies via the camera's S-video out. Cameras with S-video in can often be used to capture analogue video.
- 3 Enthusiasts will pay for a more flexible camera. Good manual focus and colour viewfinder mean better camerawork, an external microphone transforms your audio, and good battery and charger options keep you filming for longer. A high-resolution CCD might improve video quality, but while this and a flash memory slot will make your DV camera double as a digital camera, quality will be basic.
- 4 Miniature DV cameras, especially those using tiny MicroMV tapes, may tempt gadget-lovers, but picture quality may be compromised. Models with fancy on-camera editing are a waste of money; that's what your PC is for.
- 5 If you're serious about film-making, £1,500 buys you a DV camera with superb optics, three CCDs and the requisite connectors to attach equally expensive professional AV accessories.

FILL IN YOUR SPECS HERE

(Recommended minimum in grey)

CCD: 400,000 pixels

ZOOM: 10x optical/300x digital

VIDEO PORTS: FireWire out, S-video out

MONITORING: Mono viewfinder, 2.5" colour LCD

MEDIA: MiniDV tape

STILLS CAPTURE: 640x480 to tape

EXTRAS: Remote control